



NEWS FROM NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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NOAA AND PARTNERS' EFFORTS COLLECT ANOTHER 14 PLUS TONS OF DEBRIS IN NORTHWESTERN HAWAIIAN ISLANDS

Over 14 tons of derelict fishing gear has been removed from the fragile coral reef environment of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Marine National Monument during a recent 28-day multi-agency removal effort coordinated by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Marine Debris Program.

Working aboard the NOAA ship *Oscar Elton Sette*, the 13-person marine debris team conducted in-water surveys and debris removal operations at Kure Atoll and Pearl and Hermes Atoll, covering over 5.3 square kilometers. Land debris was collected with assistance from the U.S. Department of Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center's Protected Species Division at both atolls as well as at French Frigate Shoals.

Earlier this year marine debris removal efforts collected almost two tons of land debris from Laysan and Lisianski Islands, and working with the U.S. Coast Guard an additional two and a half tons of land-based debris was gathered from the Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge. All debris collected is recycled to provide electricity to Hawaii residents through a partnership with Schnitzer Steel Hawaii and Covanta Energy.

"NOAA has a long-standing commitment to the people of Hawaii to seriously address the issue of marine debris, both through identification and removal, as well as through research, education and public awareness of this critical issue impacting not only the health of the Hawaiian ecosystem, but the entire planet's ocean," said John H. Dunnigan, assistant administrator of NOAA's National Ocean Service which oversees the NOAA Marine Debris program.

Since 1996, NOAA's Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center has been working to remove hazardous marine debris from the NWHI, where it injures marine life, destroys coral reef habitat, and threatens safe navigation. With the support of NOAA's Coral Reef Conservation Program, a large scale removal effort was conducted from 2001 – 2005 aimed at reducing the massive amounts of debris that collect in the NWHI due to their location in the current gyres of the North Pacific Ocean.

Starting this year, the marine debris team is conducting smaller, more targeted efforts focusing on high density areas of derelict fishing gear. Data collected will contribute towards a new research project starting this year to determine the annual rate of debris deposits in locations throughout the Hawaiian islands. It is hoped that the study will help managers determine new approaches to managing this growing global concern.

Annual NWHI debris accumulation is estimated to be over 52 metric tons. The marine debris team and its many federal, state, local, NGO, industry, and academia partners have collected over 560 metric tons of debris in the NWHI since 1996.

The debris problem is not just an issue in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, but also a concern in the main Hawaiian isles. In 2006, NOAA's Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center, with support from NOAA's Marine Debris Program, undertook the first comprehensive look at marine debris in the main Hawaiian Islands.

Between February and May 2006, the NOAA Marine Debris program completed helicopter surveys to assess the distribution, abundance, and impact of marine debris in the main Hawaiian islands. The islands of Oahu, Kauai, Hawaii, Maui, Lanai, and Molokai were successfully surveyed in 13 days over the course of 50 flight hours. A total of 711 sites comprising more than a quarter-million tons of marine debris were identified, with most found on beaches. A pilot clean-up effort was conducted on Oahu, in which over 15 tons of debris was removed from Oahu's shorelines.

The NOAA Marine Debris program works with other NOAA offices including NOAA Fisheries, the National Ocean Service, and Hawaii Sea Grant as well as other federal, state and local agencies and private sector partners to support national, state, local and international efforts to protect and conserve our nation's natural resources and coastal waterways from the impacts of marine debris. The debris removal projects are part of a nationwide effort that also includes addressing marine debris in the Pacific Northwest, the Gulf coast, and Florida as well as Hawaii.

In 2007 NOAA, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, celebrates 200 years of science and service to the nation. From the establishment of the Survey of the Coast in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson to the formation of the Weather Bureau and the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries in the 1870s, much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems ([GEOSS](#)), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 60 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

--- 30 ---

On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA's National Ocean Service: <http://oceanservice.noaa.gov/>

NOAA's Marine Debris Program - <http://www.marinedebris.noaa.gov/>

Editor Note: Photos and maps of Hawaii marine debris available at: www.noaa.gov